

Report on “Understanding Sustainable Development in the Indo-Pacific: Analysis of Climate Induced Migration and Vulnerabilities”

Event Overview

On the 14th of October 2024, the Pankaj Kumar Jha Centre for Security Studies (PKJCSS) at the Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA), hosted a thought-provoking lecture on sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific and its impact on climate change and environmental movements. The lecture was delivered by Professor Dr Nanda Kishor MS, Head and Associate Professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations.

Opening Remarks

The event began with an introduction by Harini Vallal J, Coordinator for PKJCSS, who warmly welcomed Dr Nanda Kishor and shared his impressive background. She noted his role as Associate Professor at Pondicherry University and his position as Sri Aurobindo Chair and Coordinator of the Centre for Ground-Level Studies. She highlighted Dr Kishor's international experience, including his post-doctoral work at the University of Leiden, Netherlands, and his recognition as a recipient of the ERASMUS MUNDUS Fellowship from the European Union.

She also mentioned his involvement in major research conferences, like the Whitby Institute and the Islamic Theology of Counter-terrorism. She wrapped up by mentioning Dr Kishor's recent book, *Imagining India in the Geopolitics of the 21st Century*, and his expertise in areas such as Karma and the Ayodhya Shastra, while emphasizing his wide-ranging research contributions.

Narratives on the Climate Agenda

In a comprehensive presentation, Dr Kishore highlighted the growing importance of climate change on the agendas of many states, given the wide-ranging repercussions it brings. One of the key issues he emphasized was climate-induced migration, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. As climate change continues to reshape the global landscape, states are adopting more aggressive policies to address its pressing challenges. However, Dr Kishore pointed out that current narratives about tackling climate change often focus narrowly on states and their perceived inability to manage the crisis. This sentiment is echoed by many stakeholders, leading to a lack of attention on critical issues like climate migration, which, as he noted, has not been adequately addressed within the UN framework. This gap is particularly pronounced

in regions like the Pacific Islands, where the impact of climate change is felt most acutely. Dr Kishore stressed the importance of addressing these issues, especially in light of the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters like tsunamis, which create "crisis situations" with devastating consequences.

Furthermore, Dr Kishore emphasized that climate change must be framed not just as a developing world issue but as a global concern, including developed nations. Only when the issue is recognized as universal can developing countries receive the necessary aid and support from more affluent nations to effectively combat the crisis. This global perspective is essential for bridging the resource and capability gaps between developed and developing countries, ensuring a coordinated and equitable response to climate challenges.

Indo-Pacific and Climate Change

Dr Kishore placed considerable emphasis on the vulnerabilities that the Indo-Pacific region faces due to climate change, particularly in areas within the Pacific Ring of Fire. He highlighted key challenges that have created a crisis-like scenario in the region, such as extreme weather events and resulting resource shortages, which directly affect the socio-economic stability of the nations involved.

He also touched on the region's diverse economic significance, as it connects small island states with larger nations like India and China. As climate change intensifies, issues like climate migration have become more prominent, forcing large segments of the population to relocate. This has brought climate migration to the forefront of the many challenges facing the Indo-Pacific, a trend that has gained increasing relevance in recent years.

Importance of Climate-Induced Migration and Its Implications

Dr Kishore highlighted the complexity of addressing the concept of "climate-induced migration" compared to "climate refugees." He explained that the choice of terminology plays a crucial role in how these issues are understood and addressed, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. One of the main challenges lies in defining whether climate-induced migrants should be granted protections similar to those fleeing armed conflict or political persecution. This confusion makes it harder to categorize and address their plight, which is already a growing problem in the region.

Dr Kishore pointed out that while "climate-induced migration" is the preferred term, it lacks legal backing under existing UN protocols. This legal gap leaves affected populations without the necessary support or international recognition, despite the clear link between climate change and forced migration. He stressed that this issue has serious implications for regional security, particularly as climate-induced events that were once predicted for 2050 are already happening today. Countries like India, especially coastal cities like Mumbai and Chennai, are at high risk of facing these challenges sooner than anticipated.

Beyond the humanitarian aspect, Dr Kishore underscored that climate-induced migration is also a critical security issue. The movement of displaced communities can strain host resources and create tensions between migrants and local populations. This can lead to conflicts over access to services and exacerbate existing social tensions. To address these challenges, Dr Kishore emphasized the need for tailored, comprehensive policy responses that consider the specific needs of each affected community. A one-size-fits-all approach will not be sufficient to manage the complex and varied impacts of climate-induced migration.

Examples and Case Studies

Dr Kishore illustrated the regional impact of climate change with real-world examples, starting with the Philippines, which faces the serious threat of rising sea levels that could submerge entire communities. He also mentioned Bangladesh, where coastal populations are being displaced into cities like Dhaka, a place already overwhelmed by overcrowding, political challenges, and resource shortages.

He also highlighted that cities like Delhi are at risk from climate-induced events, which could lead to mass migration out of the city. The situation is even more precarious in the Pacific Islands, where economic growth is already fragile. Dr Kishore pointed to key industries like fisheries, tourism, and agriculture, which could be destabilized by climate change, further threatening livelihoods.

These examples make it clear how critical it is to address climate change's impact on vulnerable communities and fragile economies.

Conclusion and Q&A Session

Dr Kishore wrapped up the session by stressing the urgent need to tackle climate change and its impact on human mobility, especially in the Indo-Pacific. He emphasized the importance of

crafting innovative policies and urged stronger collaboration, not just from governments but also from international organizations and civil society. These partnerships, he explained, are vital to developing well-rounded solutions for climate-induced migration.

He also highlighted the need for grassroots, bottom-up approach, calling for local community strategies that incorporate sustainable practices. This, he said, would help close the gap between policymaking and the real-world challenges people face on the ground.

The session ended with an interactive Q&A, where students asked a variety of questions—ranging from the role of developed nations in addressing climate change to the issue of displacement caused by climate events. Dr Kishore responded with deeper insights, providing tailored solutions that focused on the specific needs of the Indo-Pacific region.

To close, Prof (Col) Shashank Ranjan, the Centre Director, expressed his gratitude to Dr Kishore, finishing the session with a thank you note to the guest for his valuable insights and time.